

Looking Into a Shidduch

The rules of giving/getting information about others

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The Gemara¹ tells us that one of the questions that we will be asked by the Bais Din shel maalah, is “asakta b’pirya v’rivya” which means “did you engage in having children”. It doesn’t say did you have children but rather engaged in having children. The Maharsha² explains that a person is not just asked about his/her own family, but also if they were busy trying to create shidduchim for others as well.

Knowing the proper information to convey in shidduchim is relevant to many of us, whether in suggesting a shidduch, investigating a shidduch, or being asked questions about a shidduch. A person must be familiar with the basics of hilchos lashon hara to know what they are not allowed to say, what they are allowed to say, and sometimes what they are obligated to say.

The people ask, “why say anything negative at all. I don’t want to be the one to “ruin” the shidduch?” This feeling is quite common, to the extent that people, even for those less conscious of hilchos lashon hara in other settings, when asked for shidduch information, they freeze up, nervous that they will say the wrong thing. This is clearly the work of the yatzer hara, to get one to speak negatively when he shouldn’t, and not speak when he is supposed to.

One might be tempted to ask for information, without mentioning that it is for a shidduch, in order to get the other person to speak freely! However, the Chofetz Chaim³ warns that one may not do this, for without knowing that the information is for a positive reason, l’toeles, the speaker will be guilty of speaking lashon hara.

The obligation to share proper information comes from several sources in the Torah.

They include:

לא תעמוד על דם רעך⁴ –

the chiyuv to protect a yid from physical, emotional and financial harm⁵

ואהבת לרעך כמוך –

help a yid the same way you would want to be helped⁶

לפני עור לא תתן מכשול –

one must avoid giving another yid bad advice⁷

To understand what should/could be said, a quick review is needed of the basics of sharing negative information l’toeles. The Chofetz Chaim⁸ mentions them several times in his sefer, and we will list those most relevant to sharing information for a shidduch. There are several acronyms used to help remember them. We will use **SPEAKS: Source, Purpose, Exaggeration, Avoidable, Knowledge and Suspect.**

Source- You must be sure of the facts. This usually only comes from first-hand knowledge of a situation. Second-hand information is very limited. The Chofetz Chaim⁹ deliberates about repeating such second-hand information at all without first checking into it yourself for accuracy¹⁰.

This includes making sure you have the whole story. At times people use events to develop an opinion about someone, while missing some details that would change the narrative¹¹.

Purpose¹²- This perhaps is the most challenging one. The information must be shared solely for the purpose of helping the questioner. If you have animosity towards either the individual or the family, and enjoy saying negative things about them, you will be culpable for the lashon hara spoken, even if you supplied critical and helpful information.

Based on this, one may not share information that might be outdated. For example, an elementary school rebbi or morah might not have seen their student in many years and does not know how they developed in later years. The negative information they provide does not give an accurate picture of the person and must be avoided.¹³ This certainly includes only sharing relevant information. Things like his father’s decorum in a mesivta dorm, or that her uncle left kollel after 3 years, has no bearing on the shidduch and may not be shared.

If the side you are talking to has already made up their mind to go ahead with the shidduch, despite what you might say, there is no constructive purpose in sharing anything negative¹⁴. It will just be put in a mental reservoir, to be used during a future family disagreement (I should have listened when they said...).

In regard to the one asking questions, one has to stay focused on questions that will help the shidduch. Questions about other family members, or things that don't make any difference to the shidduch must be avoided.

[If for whatever reason, you cannot remove from your heart that enjoyment, it still may be muter to say. The Chofetz Chaim¹⁵ writes that as long as the primary agenda is for toeles, negative information may be said. Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l is quoted as ruling this way as well¹⁶.]

Exact¹⁷- When giving over negative information, you need to give over the facts, and only the facts. You may not exaggerate or embellish in any way. If the person often comes late, you may not say they “always” come late, or that they “never” come on time.

This includes not giving your personal analysis or labels of a person and their character. For example, while you can share examples that demonstrate a person's lack of motivation, but you cannot share your opinion by labeling them as “lazy”. Other harmful labels include “quiet”, “heavy” or “slow”.

As an aside, many times these labels are not only an exaggeration, but a complete distortion of the person. The Chofetz Chaim¹⁸ writes very strong words against those who are quick to tag others with negative labels. There are positive attributes that cynical people paint as negative, such as being eirlech and yashar. Therefore, to stick a person with such a label would not only be lashon hara, but hotza'as sheim rah as well.

Avoidable¹⁹- If you are able to discourage the shidduch without divulging negative information, you are obligated to do so. Simply say “Trust me, this shidduch is not for you” without getting into the details. Sharing anything negative is permitted only when necessary.²⁰

Knowledge of any additional damage²¹- While the person in question might not be the right shidduch for you, they do have the right to get married. The negative information may not be spread to others, and the questioner, who doesn't know anything firsthand, cannot tell it over to others. If you feel that the people you are talking to have loose lips, and will share negative information with others, thereby hurting the subject's future shidduchim, you may not share anything negative with them.²²

Suspect- Even if you are required to find out information about a perspective shidduch, you have no right to believe the information as fact²³. You may only be suspicious that the information given might be true and reject the shidduch based on that suspicion. However, you may not repeat it to anyone else or treat/view the person negatively because of what you have heard.

WHAT NEGATIVE INFORMATION MUST BE SHARED?

When it comes to sharing negative information, Poskim divide them into 3 levels of issues. 1) An inherent issue, called a chesaron b'etzem, 2) Important, but not a deal breaker, and 3) General questions.

1) Inherent issue/chesaron b'etzem²⁴

- There are certain facts about a prospective shidduch that are objectively negative and would cause almost anyone to reject the shidduch. These include chilul shabbos, heretical beliefs, questionable lineage²⁵, abusive behavior, fertility challenges²⁶, serious physical, emotional or mental disability. In these situations, you must say something, even without being asked, to save a person and their family from the pain of being involved in such a shidduch.
- Even more, if you have this information, and see that a shidduch is progressing, while the other side is oblivious to it, you would be halachically mandated to ensure that the other side is made aware of the issue.
- HOWEVER, even if there is information that needs to be shared, it does not need to be done right away. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l²⁷ writes that one may hold off on sharing certain things with the other side, even severe things that must be made known, until after the two have met and see if there is any potential.
- Moreover, it is possible that the other side does know about this issue already, but because of some issues on their own side, they are willing to overlook it or give it a chance. If people are calling them about the issue, it might make them too self-conscious to proceed.

Included in this level, are inherent issues to this family. Sometimes it is clear that the two people don't match up at all, and it is “not a shidduch”. For example, the boy in question plans to go to medical school, while the girl is looking to marry a kollel yungerman.²⁸ Saying something right away will just save everyone a lot of time and effort. It is like a man looking for a size 50 suit and being suggested a size 30!

There are some issues that would cause almost everyone to avoid the shidduch, but if they found out only afterward, they would figure out how to deal with it. Most poskim, including Rav Shlomo Zalman

Auerbach, Rav Eliyashiv, Rav Nissim Karelitz and others²⁹ rule that not telling the other side is causing them a lot of pain, and the information must be shared. One example would be an illness that is not life threatening but would make a big difference to their lifestyle.³⁰

2) Important, but not a deal breaker

There are some things that are important to know, but it does not necessarily affect the ability of the boy or girl to be a good spouse and parent. These include being diabetic, the religious level of the siblings³¹, or a bad middah³². The Chofetz Chaim explains that while it would be helpful for one side to know this information, it would be hurting the other side. In situations like these, in which it is not clear if there will be any harm to anyone, one may not choose to do chesed for one person at the expense of another, and this information should be left out of any conversation.

However, if the people are relying on you for information, or the shadchan is very influential and is being relied on fully, one must be clear with them about the maalos and any potential issues.³³ Also if the questioner is a relative or a close friend, one is required to help them out, even if the other person loses out.³⁴

What if they ask straight out? You may not lie to them, nor advise them improperly. You should tell the truth, while keeping the negativity to a minimum. Focus on the person's attributes and minimize their faults.

(You should keep in mind that not everything perceived as bad is really a chisaron. For example, as one gadol shlita pointed out, one who is taking anxiety medication might not be an issue, for they are dealing with their challenge. Perhaps the one ignoring their anxiety and not taking medication is the one with the problem!)

3) General questions

These are the most common questions that are asked, but also the trickiest in hilchos lashon hara. These do not involve "saving" anyone, so there is no heter to say anything negative. Still, giving the right information can help someone really find the shidduch they are looking for.

An additional challenge is knowing what they want to hear, or what their concepts are. Words like "masmid", "nice", "lamdin", "baalas chesed", "yeshivish", lose much of their meaning when you don't know who you are talking to. If someone is asked these types of questions, you really can't say much more than basic generalities.³⁵

SO, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO SAY?

- If you are asked a direct question such as "is he a metzuin in learning?", and he is a nice boy, but not a metzuin, you can't really answer the question.

To say he is not a metzuin is very objective and will mean different things to different people. Rather you should speak about it in a subtle tone. Don't say "no, he is not a metzuin", but rather "a metzuin? I don't know about titles. But I know he is good"³⁶. If the person is really looking for an objective metzuin, he will follow up with the proper questions.³⁷ If the caller insists that the bochur they are looking for must be an illui, even if it is unreasonable for that family, you may not lie just to advance the shidduch.³⁸

- One effective way to give very clear information is to use examples and stories, rather than labels. This gives the listener a better idea of the picture you are trying to portray.³⁹ Simply saying that the bochur is a masmid is marginally effective but saying that he is known not to waste a minute of seder, does a better job in conveying his connection to learning.
- Another approach is to try to understand the questioner. If you know the person, or the perspective they are coming from, you can speak their language. Ask some questions to get a better sense of what they need to know, and what they are looking to find out.⁴⁰

[A certain Rosh Yeshiva was called about a bochur and told the perspective shver that this bochur was a "big masmid" and mentioned the boy's hasmadah a few times. A talmid who witnessed the conversation asked the Rosh Yeshiva, "this boy is a nice bochur, but he was the "askan" of the yeshiva, taking care of the kitchen and other ancillary things. How could he be called a masmid?" The Rosh Yeshiva explained that this man is looking for a son-in-law to bring into his business, not to sit in kollel. The baal habaas asked about hasmadah, but he really wanted to know if the boy is responsible, honest and reliable, which he is. For this person, the bochur is a masmid!"]⁴¹

- Many times, people are asking about things they perceive as negative but are not an issue at all. One example is a girl who is "quiet". While they might be quiet in social settings, at home they are more comfortable and talkative. One who is asked "is she quiet" should focus on the fact that she is refined and pleasant, and avoid the trigger words that turn people away from a shidduch⁴²

TIPS FOR THOSE ASKING QUESTIONS:

A person is expected and obligated to investigate a perspective shidduch. They can even ask many people, as much as needed to provide clarity⁴³.

When asking questions, one should try to ask specific questions about the person, rather than ask general ones. Ask for examples to get a better picture.

Sometimes, a shaliach who is more familiar with the person being questioned, might do a better job getting helpful information. Therefore, although it is better for the families themselves to find out the information, in order to minimize the spread of negative information, poskim allow asking others to do the fact finding, if it will be more effective.⁴⁴

There are some general tips to keep in mind:

- Don't be hesitant in giving information, it is seen as a bad sign. Be enthusiastic to speak about the person in question and focus on their maalos.⁴⁵
- One is allowed to exaggerate a little, and often it is expected that whatever positive thing is said, it is less than that. So, if a person is smart, say she is very smart etc.⁴⁶
- If you need to give thought or to ask a shailah as to the right thing to say, ask the questioner if you can call back later when it is easier to talk.⁴⁷
- Be aware that the halachos of lashon hara apply to all family members as well. Sharing facts with siblings or grandparents is usually not for any toes and must be avoided.
- One who was told negative information in confidence and in secret, must ask a Rav before disclosing anything private to others.⁴⁸

1 גמ' שבת לא ע"א
 2 מהרש"א שם
 3 חפץ חיים הל' לשה"ר כלל ד סעי' יא, או מטעם ה' יסלח לה שחושב שהוא עושה עברה, או מטעם שאם אין כוונתו לתועלת, עדיין בכלל לשה"ר ממש עיי"ש באריכות וכו' לשה"ר כלל ב' במ"ח ס"ק ג,
 4 ויקרא פרק יט פסוק טז
 5 הל' רכילות כלל ט במ"ח ס"ק א מאריך לבאר ע"פ גמ' סנהדרין עג ע"א ורמב"ם סה"מ ל"ח רצז שלא תעמוד כולל כל ההצלת חבירו בין בנשפו בין בממונו. ומחויב להגיד "לשה"ר" כדי להציל חבירו מהפסד.
 6 ע"ח פתיחה עשין אות ב'
 7 ויקרא פרק יט פסוק יד רש"י פי' לפני סומא בדבר לא תתן עצה שאינה הוגנת לו, ומש"כ שהאיסור הוא רק לגבי ישראל, עק רמב"ם ספר המצות ל"ח רצט, שערי תשובה ש"ג אות, וספר החינוך מצוה רלב
 8 לשה"ר כלל י סעי' א-ב, רכילות כלל ט סעי' ב'
 9 לשה"ר שם במ"ח ס"ק ה. עיי"ש כלל ז במ"ח ס"ק טו שמתפקד אי מהני לומר "שמעת", אבל בכלל ד' במ"ח ס"ק מג, וכלל ח סעי' י ושכתב בפשיטות שמתור בכה"ג
 10 עיי"ש שמוכח מרשב"ם ב"ב לט ע"ב ד"ה ומו"ד, שמוחר לספר מה ששמע מאחרים, וכתב ב' תירוץ א' שלא אמר כאלו הוא יודע מעצמו, אלא כך שמעתי מאחרים, גם יאמר בלשון "שמעתי" הוא יוצא ב' תירוץ ויהיה מותר להגיד. אחרים עיי"ש.
 11 לשה"ר שם כתב שיתבונן היטב את עצם הענין, וזהו כולל מש"כ למעלה עיי"ש במ"ח ס"ק ו'
 12 שם אות ה. במ"ח ס"ק י' שבכמה מקומות בחז"ל מוכח שעשיית היזק לאחר לתועלת, הכל תלוי בכונת העושה.
 13 עטרת דודאים ממז"ר הגר"ד צוקער שליט"א, זכרון חיים סי' א, כתב שם שרוב הלכות שם מוסד על הקונטרס מי מנחות בספר זרע חיים על הל"ח)
 14 ד"ע
 15 לשה"ר שם במ"ח ס"ק מד
 16 בקש שלום ח"א עמ' לג, הובא בדרשו ח"ח הל' לשה"ר כלל י שם סוף הערה 42
 17 לשה"ר שם אות ד
 18 צוירם בסוף הספר, צויר ג אות ה
 19 ובמ"ח ס"ק יא מביא ראיה מגמ' סנהדרין יא ע"א לגבי מעשה עכן. רגילות כלל ט סעי' ב, במ"ח ס"ק ה
 20 אם יש טירחא גדול או הפסד מנוון מהשידוך בלי להגיד הדברים רעים, ע' דרשו ח"ח לשה"ר כלל י הערה 22 שמביא מתיירם להגיד ע"פ שו"ע י"ד ס"י קמב סעי' ט
 21 שם אות ז, רכילות כלל ט במ"ח ס"ק ה
 22 לשה"ר שם סעי' ז. בהל' לשה"ר כלל ו במ"ח ס"ק ל מסביר שאע"פ שיש חיוב להציל א' מהזיק, א"י להציל א' על החשבון של השני, דמאי חזית א' על השני, והאיסור לשה"ר נשאר במקומו, דשב ואל תעשה עדין.
 23 הל' לשה"ר כלל ו סעי' ב ע"פ גמ' נדה סא ע"א. עטרת דודאים שם עמ' סט אות ב כתב "ולכתחילה משהולך ללאול יחשוב בשעתו שלכל גנות אשר ישמע יחוש בלבד ולא יקבל"
 24 סוף ספר חפץ חיים צוירם צויר ג אות ד אות ו, רכילות כלל ט במ"ח ס"ק א שאם לאו הרי עובר על לא תעמוד על דם רע. ע' מסורת משה ח"ג שער חמישי אות עב, שהגרמ"פ זצ"ל אמר שעל ג' מומים מוכרח להגיד הצד השני, א' מום שיגרום בזבוז ממון הרבה, ב' מי שיש חשש גדול שיהיה מניעה בפרו רבו, וג' מי שיש קלקול שנוגע לשימוש או לשימוש.
 25 מנחת יצחק ח"ה סי' מד, וח"ס קז, ציץ אליעזר ח"ז סי' מט אות ג
 26 מסורת משה ח"א אבע"ז אות ח שאשה שאין לה וסת מוכרח להגיד לצד האישי. פשטות כוונתו היא שהיו מום לגבי פו"ר
 27 אג"מ או"ח ח"ד סי' קית. אבע"ז ח"ד סי' לב אות ד, ע' עטרת דודאים שם אות ה
 28 Other examples include a family against smoking / only interested in a person with a certain look 28
 29 הובא מקומם בח"ח דרשו סוף ספר ח"ח צויר ג' סוף אות יא וכו' כ' תשובות והנהגות ח"ו סי' רצז-ז, נשמת אברהם סי' ה סעי' ח' בשם צ"א חלק יז סי' מט. וכבר יודע מקהילות יעקב בימות סי' מד שמיקל בזה ע"פ גמ' שם סעי' א עיי"ש.
 30 אם הנשאל צריך להגיד על איהו מחלה, ע' נשמי"א אבע"ז סי' ב בשם הגרש"א שנסתפק בה, אבל דרשו שם מביא בשם גדולי הפוסקים שיש חיוב להודיע
 31 ע' מסורת משה ח"ב שער חמישי אות קמב-קמג, וכו' בכמה מקומות בכת"י שאין למנוע משידוך בעבור זה, ואין להגיד לצד השני אם לא שאלו מפורש על זה. ע' קריינא דאיברתא ח"ב מכתב ח' וארחות רבינו ח"א עמק רסה מבעל קה"י מש"כ בה
 32 זהו מדה שהצד השני לאו דוקא נמנעו מהשידוך מחמת זה. אבל אם ידוע שהצד השני לא משדכים עמו בגלל זה, זהו חסרון עצום שבבילם, ופסקו הגריש"א שצריך לגלות להם, אפילו אם לא שאלוהו על זה (הובא בדרשו צוירם הערה 31)
 33 ע' דרשו שם אות 8 בשם הגרש"א והגר"ח זצ"ל.
 34 עטרת דודאים שם אות ט, ובכ', תשובות והנהגות ח"ד סי' ש"ב ע"פ גמ' משום "מבשרך לא תתעלם"
 35 ע"ד שם אות יד
 36 ע"ד שם אות ז
 37 ע"ח סוף הספר צויר ג אות ו שמחייב אבי הלה לבאר מידת החכמה של החתן, ואם לא עשה כן, "איהו אפסיד אנפשיה".
 38 ע"ד שם אות יב
 39 שמעתי עצה נפלאה זאת מרה"צ ר' דניאל קאליש שליט"א
 40 ע"ד שם עמ' עא אות ו
 41 ע"ד שם עמ' עג סוף אות יג מעשה נורא כע"ז מהגר"א קטלר זצ"ל
 42 ע"ד אות י
 43 ע"ד שם עמ' סט אות א
 44 ע' דרשו צוירם סוף אות 91 בשם הגריש"א והגר"ח זצ"ל, וכו' ע"ד שם שם אות ד
 45 ע"ד עמ' עא אות ג
 46 ע"ד אות ז
 47 ע"ד עמ' עא אות ב
 48 ע"ד חוט שני הל' שמירת הלשון פ"ה מש"כ מחז"א, צ"א חלק טז ס"ד, ע"ד שם עמ' עא אות ג



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